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Facilitating Change in the Occupational and Personal Self-Perceptions of Workers in the Community: A Co-Operative Inquiry.

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Dissertation submitted to the University of Liverpool for the Degree of Master of Arts (Counselling Studies) in part fulfilment of the modular Programme in Counselling Studies.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an exploration and evaluation of the impact of a ten session counselling skills course on workers within the community, using new paradigm experiential research as described by John Heron (1994a). The ten participants who completed the course were employees of two registered charitable organisations: three from The Chester, Cheshire and Clwyd Blind Welfare Society and seven from Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes. Results were obtained by means of self-report, group presentations, appraisal forms, facilitator observation and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. The combined results suggest that the course enhanced job-satisfaction, self-esteem and well-being for the participants; while also promoting their learning of counselling skills by experiential means.

DECLARATION

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

Signed:



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My thanks are due to all of the tutors with whom I have had contact during my counselling studies. They have provided me with interest and challenge, also giving me the support I needed on the occasions when motivation flagged.

Among those tutors special thanks are extended to David Somerville, who first introduced me to the concept of new paradigm research, and Gordon Lynch for comments and criticisms which were always non-judgemental and constructive.

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Last, but by no means least, my gratitude is owed to my research participants. They are all extremely busy people who willingly gave their time to my project.

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INTRODUCTION.

The motivating factor for this piece of research was the present researcher's belief that a ten session course in basic counselling skills, together with its integral opportunities for self-development, would be instrumental in improving job-satisfaction, self-esteem and emotional well-being for people working within the community. It was also anticipated that participation in such a course would enhance the workers' ability to empathise with the needs of clients, family carers and members of staff in order to provide them with emotional as well as practical support.

For the purpose of this piece of work self-esteem can be seen to equate with subjective self-evaluation. This self-evaluation encompasses an individual's assessment of their own performance and their interpretation of the assessment made by others, both in relation to self-pointed ideals and culturally learned standards. It involves the individual evaluating his/her degree of success or failure in doing what his/her identity entails (Burns, 1979). In accepting this definition of self-esteem one can easily identify its link with job-satisfaction.

Within this definition self-esteem is not influenced by the judgement that what one does is good in itself but that one is good at what one does. There is the belief that if roles are played properly then collective purposes are seen to be served and individual esteem enhanced. Thus self-esteem at an individual level is achieved by successful

adjustment to ongoing circumstances. For workers in the community, such as those taking part in this study, these circumstances include the pursuance of work in private homes where there is little opportunity for feed-back from either peers or employers (Burns, 1979). Because of this low level of feed-back it is felt that self-esteem and job-satisfaction could best be enhanced by in-service training such as the proposed course in basic counselling skills.

A strong link between positive self-perception and the development of skills is pointed out by Sylge (1995). She states that when an individual evaluates the service which they provide and their role within it they are helped with decisions about their own personal strengths and weaknesses. This means that skills training is able to enhance both job-satisfaction and personal self-esteem.

That training to reach a new level of functioning may, conversely, lead to the trainee feeling de-skilled is highlighted by Aveline (1991). He suggests that trainers should be aware of this common phenomenon, and its effect on trainees' self-esteem, and take steps to obviate this consequence.

With the above stricture in mind the present writer will seek to present the new learning in a manner which embodies the characteristics of a Person-Centred counsellor. Thorne (1991) describes a tutor who made it possible for groups with whom he worked to "relax into learning and to feel, not pressure, but the space in which to feel and think"

(Thorne, 1991 page 11). Each person within these groups felt uniquely recognised yet secure. Here is an approach which one can strive to emulate, so that trainees' self-development is a positive process.

The opportunities for self-development within counselling skills training are demonstrated by Mearns and Thorne (1990). They see this training as a vehicle for the provision of a group where it is possible to access and articulate feelings, safe in the knowledge that such feelings will be respected and understood. As the group members learn that negative, as well as positive, feelings are acceptable to the training group they learn greater self-acceptance and move towards self-love (Rogers, 1990). It could be suggested that when an individual learns greater self-acceptance he/she gains the confidence to enlarge his/her horizons and set higher goals of achievement. This healthy personal growth, together with enhanced self-esteem, leads toward self-actualisation and emotional well-being.

This project, therefore, seeks to explore and evaluate the impact of a Counselling Skills course on the personal development of the course members as well as on their capacity to carry out their work in the community.

A personal interest in the chosen area of exploration was triggered by research carried out by McArdle and McDermott (1994). They showed that participation in a training course for counselling skills had a beneficial effect on

the occupational self-perceptions of health visitors and school nurses.

This choice of area of study can be seen to be further supported by McLeod (1994) when he lays out a suggested research agenda for counselling. One of the areas where he feels that research is needed is "the training, support and supervision needs of voluntary, non-professional counsellors" (McLeod, 1994 page 41). The present writer feels that Crossroads Co-ordinators and Blind Welfare Society Home Visitors would fall into this category by virtue of their constant use of counselling skills within the community.

However, although the research by McArdle and McDermott (1994), mentioned above, was felt to be relevant and was read with some interest, it seemed that the use of statistical findings to demonstrate their results did not mix well with the subjective nature of their topic. The present writer was, therefore, drawn toward new paradigm research as illustrated by Peter Reason (1994a) in his study entitled "Whole Person Medical Practice".

This decision to carry out a research project under the new paradigm approach meant that the stated beliefs concerning the outcomes of training in basic counselling skills could be seen as a guiding hypothesis only. Since the intention was formed to follow a theory where the research would be carried out with a group of Co-ordinators and Home Visitors

not on them, the collective expectations of the group might well affect the outcomes to be studied.

An avoidance of traditional scientific, statistical methods of research gains support from several sources. For example Harris (1995) claims that there is no common language between traditional scientific research and the study of human responses within psychotherapy, and that there is no common unit for observation.

An attempt to find such a common unit for observation could be found within Rudestam and Newton's (1992) description of quasi-experimental designs. They claim that a researcher who employs quasi-experimental methods attempts to restrict the focus of attention to a relatively narrow band of behaviour, often manipulating experimental conditions in order to further narrow the object of study to a single variable. The researcher can be seen as "getting out of harm's way as a detached and objective observer of the action" (Rudestam and Newton, 1992 page 29).

As an alternative to such a restricted approach Rudestam and Newton (1992) give an overall picture of qualitative methodologies which share three fundamental assumptions. The first of these assumptions is a holistic view which seeks to understand phenomena in their entirety, in order to develop a complete understanding of a person, a programme or a situation. The second assumption is that there will be an inductive approach where the researcher does not impose much of an organising structure, but moves

toward the development of general patterns that emerge from the case under study. The third assumption is that of naturalistic inquiry which seeks to understand phenomena in their naturally occurring states. This phenomenological framework leads to research in which the focus is on what the person experiences, described in language that is as loyal to the lived experience as possible.

The above picture of a qualitative approach to research is in complete accord with the aims of the present study, in which there is a desire to avoid manipulation and to explore a "real life" situation.

Robson (1993) picks up the theme of manipulation when he holds that to carry out "experiments" on subjects in order to gain conclusions about "real life" phenomena leads to deliberate and active control over what happens to people; this is the kind of manipulation which the present writer wishes to avoid.

That a survey is a useful alternative tool for gathering data about people is also suggested by Robson (1993), but he holds that to be conclusive a survey needs to be large scale, involving a substantial band of trained interviewers. Such a "band" is not available to the present researcher.

Robson's third option for "real life" research is a case study, which he describes as:

"a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular

contemporary phenomena within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 1993, page 5).

and this seems much more in keeping with the exploration and evaluation desired in the research now being presented.

Robson (1993) holds that it is possible to carry out a case study either with an individual or with a group. He sees this activity as "hypothesis generating", rather than "hypothesis testing", in which an initial bout of data collection is followed by analysis, the results of which are then used to decide what data should be next collected. The cycle is then repeated several times. However, whilst accepting that case studies can fill the hypothesis generating format, there are occasions when they portray hypothesis testing.

That within the above described approach to a case study the researcher obtains the participants' collaboration and gives them regular feedback on progress, problems and outcomes sits comfortably with the present writer's philosophy of life and her approach to counselling. During feedback the participants have an opportunity to check on interim findings and contribute their own analysis and interpretation (Robson, 1993). Thus there is an appreciation of the value of the contribution which the participants make to the ongoing research.

The process of feedback and checking is explored in much greater detail by Reason (1994b) when he describes the cycle of co-operative inquiry, one of the main approaches

within new paradigm research. Here a group of researchers meet to inquire into some aspect of their life and work; discuss and agree what it is they wish to research; take their decisions about research action into their lives; become fully immersed in their practice; meet to reflect on their experience and attempt to make use of it; revise and develop ideas and start anew. Here is a research model which involves an aware and self-critical movement between experience and reflection which goes through several cycles as ideas, practice and experience are systematically honed and refined.

Since Reason (1994b) allies this clear framework for research with a description of how it avoids the manipulation and exploitation connected with orthodox research methods one is encouraged to attempt to follow his lead. Therefore this research encompasses an aspiration toward setting up a co-operative inquiry which will move several times around the cycle from reflection to action and back again as described above and used by Reason (1994a) and Heron and Reason (1981, 1982). The aim is also to carry out a piece of work which has been inspired by a real perceived need, rather than the need of an academic exercise to support further professional qualification.

That this project has been inspired by a real perceived need explains what may be seen as an omission in presentation. Traditional research would at this point call for references to previous work investigating a

similar theme (Rowan and Reason, 1994), such references being designed to demonstrate that a study adds to knowledge already built up in its particular field (Rudestam and Newton, 1992). The nature of the present small scale project about a group of individuals and their problems and concerns renders references to previous work less immediately relevant. This study is directly relevant to the researcher's own work setting, carried out with a view to developing and changing that setting (Robson, 1993). It is acknowledged, however, that the study may also have relevance for other groups, and this possibility is explored within the "Discussion" chapter below. Therefore, in further support of the omission of references to previous work, it could also be suggested that use of such references would impose an organising structure at variance with the chosen, qualitative, research method (Rudestam and Newton, 1992).

The previously mentioned concept of "an academic exercise" now leads the present writer to an explanation of her use of the first person in describing the following sequence of events; hitherto, in deference to academic standards, she has avoided this form of presentation. Firstly, as a co-researcher, to write of one's own thoughts, feelings and actions in reported speech seems particularly unwieldy. Secondly, this piece of work has been largely influenced by research carried out by Reason (1994a) and Heron and Reason (1981, 1982). Their presentations in the first person make

logical and interesting reading and the present writer is happy henceforth to follow their example.

In attempting to follow the example set by Reason (1994a) and Heron and Reason (1981, 1982) this present study will encompass chapters which cover: the "Background" leading up to the study; the "Method" used; the "Progress of the course", including comments on how the counselling skills course was seen to affect the course members; a presentation of the "Results"; a "Discussion" which seeks to explore questions such as relevance and validity; and, finally, the "Conclusion" reached at the end of the study.

BACKGROUND.

"Crossroads" is a National charitable organisation which has been set up to provide support to family carers. There are around two hundred and twenty Crossroads Schemes throughout the U.K., each one run autonomously, with its day-to-day activities managed by the Scheme Co-ordinator.

Crossroads Co-ordinators are responsible for administering teams of Care Attendants who spend their working time providing domiciliary respite to those who care for an elderly or disabled relative in their own home. This means that they often experience stressful and demanding situations. They also frequently have to deal with bereavement, experiencing grief themselves as well as supporting it in the carer and/or their members of staff.

Blind Welfare Society Home Visitors provide companionship and practical support to blind or partially sighted members of their local community, many of whom are elderly. They are responsible for allocating and rationing their own time between a list of needy clients. Again the emotional demands are great.

As a Scheme Co-ordinator myself the question of providing emotional support to workers within the Crossroads organisation has long been in my mind. This perceived need has had a particularly personal relevance to my dealings with my own team of sixteen Care Attendants in the Chester District. In supporting family carers in their unceasing

task these Care Attendants are in contact with elderly and/or disabled people on a regular basis, often forming quite close relationships with individual families. The need is there for a structured emotional support system to help them to balance their degree of personal involvement, also to help them deal with their natural feelings of concern for their clients and any personal problems which these might trigger.

In assessing carers' needs, training staff and allocating staff time the Co-ordinator's role, as appreciated by the Care Attendants, is largely administrative; although I make every attempt to adopt a democratic style of leadership. Therefore, when I sought to set up a regular support group, I made the suggestion to the Care Attendants that a qualified facilitator other than myself, their own Co-ordinator, should be employed. I felt that under this arrangement they would be less inhibited about sharing their thoughts and feelings. The Chester Care Attendants, however, did not agree to this suggestion; they felt that their own Co-ordinator could offer an immediate atmosphere of trust and understanding.

Consequently I offered the Care Attendants a voluntary, open group, meeting for two hours once every two weeks, with myself as facilitator.

On the occasion of the first meeting eight Care Attendants took part. Ground-rules were established and there was general discussion about the purpose of the group. I

gained the impression that this small group was only there to please me, as the "boss"; also there was a feeling that any stresses connected with their work were only to be expected. The Care Attendants were so attuned to caring for others that the concept of caring for themselves was quite alien. Never-the-less there was a degree of sharing of experiences and feelings and I felt that a good start had been made.

On the next two occasions only four Care Attendants took part. They used the time to explore personal and family concerns and obviously benefitted from articulating their problems and sharing their feelings, gaining support from their peers. Despite this, at the end of the third session, their emergent leader said that she felt that the sessions were a waste of time and that they would only want to meet again if a real need arose.

The difficulty of keeping a voluntary group together has been highlighted by Yalom (1985) and, following this pattern, the Chester Care Attendants never requested any further support group meetings.

It may have been that, despite their protestations to the contrary, the Chester Crossroads Care Attendants were inhibited by the fact that their support group was facilitated by their own Scheme Co-ordinator. With this in mind, I approached neighbouring Crossroads Schemes' Co-ordinators with a view to giving my time to facilitate support groups for their Care Attendants. This offer was

received in rather a frosty manner - the Co-ordinators were of the opinion that they gave their staff all the support they needed!

The above described attempts to initiate structured emotional support for Crossroads Care Attendants covered a time span which brought me to the stage in my counselling studies which required a research dissertation.

My first notion was to set up a group to provide emotional support to between eight and twelve voluntary participants and research the outcomes. However, previous personal experience, substantiated by the events described above, has shown that such voluntary groups often slowly disintegrate as needs become met and other interests intervene.

The knowledge that the participants were to be instrumental in completing a piece of research may have held them together, but I felt that a structured, ten session course in counselling skills would form a firmer bond. The fact that the British Association of Counselling stipulates that self-development is ethically necessary within the type of course intended seemed to give me the opportunity to proceed with a worthwhile project.

Bearing in mind McLeod's (1994) suggestion that research should be meaningful to the counsellor, also his statement that there is no need for counselling research to maintain the traditional emphasis on quantitative methods and

statistics, my plans for this piece of work fell into place.

Again I approached the Co-ordinators of neighbouring Crossroads Schemes with an offer regarding their Care Attendants. This was an offer to provide a recognised thirty hour course in Counselling Skills to a group of between eight and fourteen participants, thus enhancing their on-going training - and, coincidentally, providing me with a research group likely to stay together for the stipulated ten sessions.

Somewhat surprisingly the above offer of free staff training was refused. It transpired, however, that the Co-ordinators themselves were interested in taking part in this course of study and a basis for forming a research group began to emerge.

The correspondence regarding the formation of the group is attached as Appendix 1. It did not prove possible for more than seven Crossroads Co-ordinators to take part, so I offered the opportunity to the Chester, Cheshire and Clwyd Blind Welfare Society who were pleased to fill five more places.

METHOD.

1. Philosophy.

The personal appeal of so-called "New Paradigm" research is that I see it as an approach where the researcher cares about what they are doing and becomes involved as a whole person (Rowan and Reason, 1994). It is hoped that this "human inquiry" will lead to a conclusion couched in language which is not only loyal to the lived experience (Rudestam and Newton, 1992), but validated by shared, interpersonal experiential knowing (Heron, 1994b). I intend to research as a participant co-researcher, not as a remote, so-called, expert.

The technique of co-operative inquiry is one which is most acceptable to me as a counsellor whose practice is mainly Person-Centred and which is based on an integrated theoretical background stemming from the works of Rogers, Ellis and Adler. My integrated stance seeks to value the cognitive ability of the client as well as accepting without judgement their full range of feelings; I have no desire to be directive or didactic. Therefore for me to research with people, rather than to impose research on them is a natural progression.

It is possible to refer back to my willingness to appreciate the cognitive abilities of my clients in order to link it with Heron's (1994b) statement that if research subjects are not privy to the research thinking they will

not be functioning as fully intelligent agents. He makes this statement in support of treating research subjects as co-researchers, accepting their ability to make worthwhile contributions. This is an approach which I am happy to attempt to emulate.

In avoiding traditional quantitative methods I will be making no attempt to make people what they are not so that they are more observable, countable or manipulable. Rather my aim is to encourage people to be who they are and to learn with them. This will be a piece of research which is worthwhile for me, also for the other people involved. The questions which we will ask are genuinely important to me and my co-researchers (Rowan and Reason, 1994).

The subjective nature of my humanistic approach to counselling, together with the subjective nature of the changes I anticipate in my co-researchers give further reasons for my choice of research method. I aim to explore, with the collaboration of the other participants, changes in the way people feel about themselves and their work, that may or may-not be brought about by participation in this Counselling Skills Course. I cannot accept that it is possible to impose quantitative measurement upon such a qualitative outcome. The importance of, and respect for, people is paramount.

2. The Participants.

The research group was formed on a voluntary basis, with participants employed either by a Crossroads Scheme or by the Blind Welfare Society. In the first instance I approached the fourteen Co-ordinators and Deputy/Assistant Co-ordinators employed by the Crossroads Schemes located within reasonable travelling distance of Chester. I sent them a letter which explained the type of course to be undertaken and the reason for the group's formation; also a grid on which they could show their preferences for day of the week and time for participation (See Appendix 1).

As a result of the above mentioned letter and subsequent correspondence seven group members were confirmed. These consisted of five Scheme Co-ordinators, one Assistant Co-ordinator and one Deputy Co-ordinator.

Only one of the prospective group members had any appreciable previous experience of academic research, and that had been in the traditional statistical school and in a completely different field. Only two had any previous training in Counselling Skills: Pam had taken a Counselling Skills Course in 1987 and had also worked for the Samaritans for four years; Cynthia has been a hospice volunteer since 1981 and completed an eight week course in 1986 entitled "Looking at Loss".

Although it may have been possible to have run the course with just seven members, past experience led me to expect

that there might be some "drop-outs" after commencement. Conversations I had previously had with the Manager of the Chester, Cheshire and Clwyd Blind Welfare Society had led to the knowledge that she was interested both in the course to be undertaken and the associated research. Hoping to make the group a more viable size I approached her with a view to some of her Home Visitors taking part and she subsequently offered them the opportunity.

As a result of the above negotiations two Blind Welfare Home Visitors from Crewe and one from Wrexham became members of the group and were joined by two Blind Welfare Society volunteers from Chester, bringing the starting number to twelve. Of the five Blind Welfare Society representatives none had had any previous experience of academic research nor of counselling skills training.

The two volunteers withdrew from the course after three sessions.

3. Materials.

The Counselling Skills Course followed the Training Manual written by Ray Woolfe and published by the Scottish Health Education Group (1989). This thirty hour course is mainly Person-Centred in approach, being based largely on the work of Carl Rogers, with some inclusion of the more structured techniques of Gerard Egan. The Course plan and outline are attached as part of Appendix 1; the Philosophy and the Aims and Objectives of the course are attached under Appendix 2.

I decided to administer Rosenberg's ten item unidimensional Self-Esteem Scale as described by Burns (1979). This scale has been found to have good test/re-test reliability (Wylie, 1974 and Silber & Tippet, 1965). The Rosenberg Scale consists of ten statements, five being phrased in a positive direction and the other five in a negative one to control for acquiescence. Participants respond to each item on a four-point scale which ranges from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Where positive items are agreed with and negative items are disagreed with, a high total score indicates high self-esteem (McArdle and McDermott, 1994).

Although I so firmly believe that quantitative methods of research, including statistics, do not sit well with the subjectiveness of counselling and the examination of feelings I felt that it would be interesting to compare the group members' self-reports with a well-tried measure. This decision may additionally be supported by reference to Robson's (1993) suggestion that multiple sources of information increase validity.

I must also admit the need, as a new researcher in the realms of counselling, for the personal security of some measurable outcome. My only previous experience of research was as part of an educational qualification, and my conclusion then was entirely based on statistical results.

4. Procedure.

The Counselling Skills Course was planned to meet for ten three hour sessions. Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale was administered at the beginning of the first session. I gave each of the group members a ring binder and asked them to complete the Scale, number it (1), date it, and then to keep it in their binder until a later date. The Scale was administered again during Session 10 and for a third time on the occasion of a follow-up review three months after the completion of the course.

Because of other commitments already in place for the Crossroads participants the course was planned to meet for three consecutive weeks, have a gap of two weeks, meet again for four consecutive weeks, have a gap of two weeks and finish with a run of three consecutive weeks. Although circumstances enforced this arrangement I felt that it enhanced the research possibilities. Group members were given time to consolidate their learning, use their new skills, and then to feed back any results. A follow-up session was planned and a date was agreed with the group to meet again three months after Session 10.

In this planned co-operative inquiry there can be seen my attempt to move several times around the research cycle, from reflection to action and back again (Reason, 1994b): sessions one to three for initial training and reflection, a two week break for action, sessions four to seven for further training and reflection, a two week break for

action, then sessions eight to ten - again for training and reflection. The three month follow-up period gave space for a longer spell of action in the field, concluded with a two hour meeting for reflection.

During the introduction to the first session I gave a brief explanation to the group about the nature of Co-operative Inquiry, including a hand-out giving a precis of its philosophy as written by Peter Reason (1994b). This precis is included as Appendix 3. I then asked group members to keep a diary in order to assist with feed-back and reflection.

As a new researcher I could find no way of expressing the guiding hypothesis without influencing the discussions, and thereby affecting the validity of any findings. I merely told my co-researchers that we were exploring the impact of the Counselling Skills Course on their work and on how they felt about themselves.

As has been explained above, none of the participants had any previous personal experience of relevant academic research and they were much more interested in acquiring counselling skills than in fitting in with new paradigm research methods. Very few of the group members kept any form of diary, and those who did were reluctant to share any thoughts or findings with the whole group.

In the event it proved most profitable for me to log the group's progress from session to session, with time set

aside for acknowledged appraisal at the half-way stage, at the end of the course and during the follow-up session. I also made use of the course evaluation sheets published as part of the Training Manual. Thus the group had unconsciously shaped the nature of the research.

5. Collection of Data.

Since this piece of work could be categorised as an exploratory study it would have been inappropriate to attempt standardised data collection devices (Robson, 1993). As intimated above data was collected by means of my own participant observation, self-report by the course participants during group discussion, group self-report by means of flip chart presentations within specified evaluation sessions and completion of course evaluation sheets. The only quantitative measure employed, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, is represented by raw scores submitted in support of the qualitative findings.

6. Data Analysis.

That there is no clear and accepted set of conventions for the analysis of qualitative data has been pointed out by Robson (1993). He does, however, quote Tesch who identifies four basic groupings of approach, two of which are used within this study. The two approaches used are "the comprehension of the meaning of the text" and "reflection" (Robson, 1993 page 372), both needing clear thinking on the part of the analyst.

In presenting my results I have attempted to process the information in a meaningful and useful manner, using sub-headings which categorise the relevant points of interest.

Any tendency toward bias or ignoring information which was not in keeping with my guiding hypothesis has been obviated by cyclic consultation with my co-researchers. I hope that I have achieved the codified common-sense which has been said to make qualitative data less complex than traditional statistical analysis (Robson, 1993).

7. Confidentiality.

As soon as I had written the chapter describing the progress of the course I sent a copy of that chapter to each of my co-researchers for their comments and/or criticisms. This was an important step in the research cycle, but also allayed my concerns regarding confidentiality.

The counselling skills training on which I and my co-researchers embarked encompassed experiential work which required that personal material be shared within the group. The self-development which took place during group discussions also led to the disclosure of thoughts and feelings which had hitherto been of a very private nature. Realising that this piece of work, by its very nature, must be examined by more than one person, I needed the group's permission to publish the personal material which had been shared. This permission I subsequently obtained

In presenting this report of my research project I attempted to write using pseudonyms for my co-researchers when describing the progress of the course and the results of the research. I found that extremely difficult - I had been such an integral part of the group interactions that using assumed names made the work lose all reality. In the event I used real names and, when sending out the copies of the "Progress of the Course" chapter, offered to change them if any of my co-researchers felt this to be advisable. No-one asked that this change of names be carried out.

When I introduced the course I had also promised group members a draft of the "Results" chapter of the research before presentation, so that any comments or corrections could be included. The circulation of these two chapters to the course members was a deliberate measure to encourage them in their role as co-researchers.

PROGRESS OF THE COURSE.

Within this chapter I will give a session by session indication of the counselling skills covered by the course. Also, for the purpose of this research, I will attempt to give an over-all impression of the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the group, with my observations about individual members where these seem to be appropriate.

The course which I have chosen, and the level of interest of the group which has agreed to take part, are an illustration of the fact that an increasing number of non-counselling professionals are acknowledging the benefits of the use of counselling skills alongside the skills of their chosen occupation (Woolfe, Dryden and Charles-Edwards, 1989). That the personal development of the course participants should be a matter for research is substantiated by the knowledge that most counselling training centres itself on the personality of the would-be counsellor (Cooper, 1991).

In presenting the course I have borne in mind the code of practice for trainers in counselling skills as laid down by the British Association for Counselling (1994). The course followed ensured a clear distinction between the use of counselling skills, counselling and other tasks. I made it clear that it was not the purpose of the training programme to offer personal counselling and that it would not be ethical for me to do so. Self-awareness was an integral

part of the course and frequent opportunities were provided for discussion and evaluation.

Most training in counselling skills has been associated with Person-Centred and Cognitive-Behavioural approaches to counselling (McLeod, 1993). The course written by Ray Woolfe (1989) which I have chosen to use follows this tradition in presenting a combination of concepts derived from Carl Rogers and Gerard Egan. The course is also representative of the general trend in counselling skills training in that there is a concentration on skills acquisition rather than the knowledge of theory (McLeod, 1993).

As will be evident as I describe the progress of the course Woolfe's training scheme is based on the Rogerian core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. To these are added action skills such as concreteness, confrontation and immediacy. My own interest in the personal development of the course members gains encouragement from McCleod (1993) when he claims that the importance of self-knowledge and self-awareness is central to many of the mainstream theoretical approaches - even within basically skills-oriented approaches to training such as the one which I have decided to adopt.

With this brief discussion regarding the background to counselling skills training I now come to the description of my progress through the course in the company of my co-researchers:

Session 1 was opened with my thanks to all of the group for sparing time to be there. It was most encouraging that all twelve individuals who had expressed interest in the course came to this first meeting. I explained that, as the facilitator, I was not there in the role of expert, that the research and the exploration of counselling skills would both be in the form of shared experience.

It was at this stage that I made my attempt to explain the concept of co-operative inquiry. It felt quite apparent that the group were paying me polite attention, but there was no discernable interest and no discussion arose. It had already started to seem that to expect the group to be active co-researchers might not be possible. I had to be content with distributing the written definition (Appendix 3) and explaining that there would be an ongoing interest in how the course may affect group members personally as well as in their professional capacity.

With a brief explanation regarding the reason for its inclusion I then asked the group to complete Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale, to date and number it and file it away for future use. I also told the participants that I would be asking them to complete the Scale on two further occasions and when those occasions would be.

Next, after some discussion, a contract was established by the group as a whole, wherein it was agreed that regular attendance, punctuality and commitment were necessary for

the completion of the research and, just as importantly, for the participants own satisfaction in successfully completing the course. The need for absolute confidentiality within the group was also agreed.

I then made it clear to the participants that, although it was desirable for them to have a willingness to use their own experience as material for skills practice, the depth of their revelations was in their own hands; also that the activities would be varied but there would be no compulsion for them to join in.

Sheets detailing the course philosophy and its aims and objectives (Appendix 2) were distributed and discussed. Group members were helped to an awareness that, although the course structure was planned, there was room for flexibility and that the activities could be adjusted according to their interests and requirements.

The activities within this first session sought to introduce the group members to me and to each other, to begin to look at listening skills and to establish a starting point for looking at the group's development.

At the end of the session the group had formed well; there was no obvious splitting between the employees/volunteers of the two different organisations. Results of small-group work showed that they shared similar fears, hopes and expectations. As this flip-chart work is relevant to

research results I include the individual small-group lists under Appendix 4.

These lists demonstrated the more practical fears of writing on "the dreaded flip-chart" and showing poor spelling ability; also fears about role-play, self exposure, making a fool of oneself, the likelihood of homework, difficult theory and the relevance of the course.

Hopes and expectations included an insight into counselling - with the possibility of going on to further studies, an ability to apply new learning to working lives, more self-confidence and self-assurance, and an opportunity to meet new people.

During group discussion at the end of the session Cynthia revealed that she is aware that she gives support to her staff, but that there is no-one who gives support to her. Her Crossroads Scheme uses a high proportion of its resources in helping the carers of terminally ill clients and, although Cynthia has received special training in this area, the stresses are obvious.

Mandy, as a fairly new Crossroads Co-ordinator, appeared to feel a little uneasy and was reticent about expressing her opinions to the whole group. She did, however, claim to have learned how to integrate a new group; saying that this knowledge would be very useful when dealing with her newly appointed Care Attendants.

Sue seemed to hold herself somewhat apart from the group. She is Deputy Co-ordinator for Chester Crossroads and there is a strong possibility that she is only part of this research out of some sense of loyalty to me. It is certainly possible that I was overcompensating for an existing, fairly close, relationship as I was being more tentative in my demands for Sue to contribute than I was for the other members. Sue may also have found the prospect of ongoing frequent contact an inhibition on what she shared. In addition an already established empathy makes me aware that she is somewhat sceptical about counselling and its application.

Chris, one of the Blind Welfare Society Home Visitors, expressed doubts about the usefulness of the Self-esteem Scale. She said that how she saw herself would depend very much on how she felt on the day, and that any changes could not be attributed to the effects of the course.

It transpired that Heather and Prim, the two Blind Welfare Society volunteers, did not make home visits. They attend the day-centre and help with cooking and craft activities for the blind and partially sighted.

Above can be seen that the group members included increased self-confidence and self-assurance among their hopes and expectations. The ability to apply recognised skills to their work situation was also anticipated. Thus they had in some measure unwittingly reflected my guiding hypothesis for this research project. In addition Cynthia had drawn

attention to what was my original premise: the need for structured emotional support for Crossroads staff.

Session 2. The main purpose of this session was to explore the differences between the use of counselling skills and other forms of helping. The group review which took place before the new topic was introduced revealed that all the members had experienced pleasure during Session 1 at the way the group had formed. They came together on this second occasion in an obvious atmosphere of mutuality.

Cynthia also reported that, during the intervening week, she had experienced an increased awareness of what she was doing when dealing with other people. There was general agreement with this realisation from the rest of the co-researchers. In order to keep in touch with her progress Cynthia said that she intended to keep a diary throughout the course.

At the end of Session 2 the whole group were in accord with the decision that their work fell between giving advice and counselling; that they needed the skills associated with both these aspects. They refuted the course author's suggestion that the use of counselling skills was merely an extension of good social interaction (Woolfe, 1989). They claimed that "it needs something special". Their understanding was demonstrated by the definition of counselling which they constructed between them. (This definition is included under Appendix 5).

Gillian's personal learning for this session was that putting things into words enabled her to see them more clearly. Other group members were in agreement.

Session 3 was based entirely on the exploration of Roger's (1990) core condition of empathy. An introductory exercise which required the "students" to identify empathic responses seemed almost too easy. This group of people who work in the service of people were already attuned to sensitive ways of communication.

The activities went well, but there was very little individual feed-back during the plenary session. There was, however, a consensus that this was a safe place in which to identify and express feelings.

Heather said how much more satisfying it was to make empathic responses, rather than to listen without responding as the requirement had been during Session 2. After this positive feed-back I was most surprised to receive a letter from Heather saying that she would not come again as the expression of feelings had left her too upset to continue. I felt guilty as well as surprised - how had I missed her emotional distress while I was acting as facilitator?

Prim also wrote to me to withdraw from the course. She felt that counselling wasn't for her; she would not be able to control her desire to give advice. My expectation that some members would drop out was thus justified.

Session 4. The purpose of this session was to explore the responding skills of paraphrasing, reflection and open ended questioning.

I had hoped that the opening review would reveal use of counselling skills in the work situation and/or changes in self-concept, as there had been a two-week break between sessions. However, I now feel that my need to share my concerns about the departure of Heather and Prim shaped the contributions toward discussion which were made by the other members.

I did not give details of what had been said to me, considering much of this to be confidential, but asked if the empathy exercises had given any of those present reason for concern. Pam reported that she had enjoyed being able to say things that she had never said before and the rest of the group agreed. I was somewhat reassured by the fact that even the other Blind Welfare Society workers had noticed nothing untoward in their colleagues' behaviour.

I took this opportunity to re-iterate that my "students" were not being trained as counsellors, but being helped to learn counselling skills for use in their existing employment. I also explained that ethically I could not offer them counselling if disturbing feelings were brought to the surface, but that I could give them a list of other counsellors from which to choose if they felt that they needed one.

Cynthia had found the empathy exercises interesting as they had revealed a different kind of counselling. She had previously only been involved with bereavement counselling. Pam has worked for the Samaritans, but had little to say about the experience. She did, however, agree with Cynthia about the interest aroused by experiencing a different approach to counselling skills.

Mandy reported that she had used her listening skills to help a friend. Stopping herself from making conventional responses had helped the friend unburden herself. Mandy was now much more relaxed than at the outset, no longer showing reluctance in making contributions to the discussions. Sue remains fairly reserved.

At the end of the session there was a good feeling of having worked together. Some of the group had found paraphrasing difficult, others had had problems with the concept of open ended questions. These difficulties led to a discussion of the somewhat artificial circumstances in which the group members were using their counselling skills. It was agreed that in such a short spell of practice there was no real need of responding skills to aid client participation.

None of my co-researchers showed any reluctance about revealing the difficulties they had experienced during this session. They seemed entirely secure in the non-judgemental acceptance of their fellow group members -

although this counselling characteristic had yet to be introduced.

It was of some interest to me to realise that the group had set up an unwritten, unspoken, norm. Although I had witnessed the use of concerns with their day-to-day employment in pair or triad exercises, organisational problems were seldom discussed during plenary sessions. Now that Heather and Prim had dropped out the three remaining Blind Welfare Society workers could easily have been swamped by Crossroads' problems, but this never happened. I feel that this showed a shared awareness and sensitivity that did not need to be articulated before taking effect.

Session 5 was devoted to exploring the second Rogerian core condition: unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1990). This concept was also described to the group as warmth and acceptance.

As was usual the session opened with a review of what had gone before, and a discussion of how counselling skills were being used between meetings.

Pam had consciously held back from using interjections when assessing a new client and had appreciated the benefit of this. The carer had found it much easier to explore her needs and communicate them to Pam.

Mandy felt that she was learning all the time to deal with people more comfortably.

Pat had found it easier to listen to a bereaved client, benefitting from the realisation that she wasn't being required to find a solution to the problem; she just needed to BE WITH her client and support her in her grief.

At this stage Pat re-introduced her difficulty in understanding the concept of open ended questioning. I led her to describe a conversation she had had with a client she wanted to encourage to talk. As her description progressed she demonstrated a frequent use of open ended questions; this was gently pointed out to her by other group members. Pat enjoyed a flash of understanding that was rewarding to witness; her contributions became more positive from here on.

Pam closed this review period with the statement that the course must be both interesting and relevant or, as very busy people, they would not all still be taking part.

It is not appropriate in this research study to take space to describe the actual content of the exercises which explored the concept of unconditional positive regard. It is sufficient to record that by the end of the session it was clear that this concept had been well understood.

In the closing plenary time Maureen expanded freely on dealing with a Care Attendant whose attitude was proving extremely difficult. She felt that this might be easier in the future if she, herself, managed to be less judgemental. There was little further discussion as the rest of the

group seemed to have difficulty in admitting to disliking dealing with anyone.

There was, however, general agreement that a self-development exercise had been very worthwhile. The group members had been asked to rate themselves on a list of personal attributes and then discuss their ratings as a paired counselling activity. Everyone claimed to have enjoyed this and learned a lot - not only about themselves!

Session 6 had the central topic of "Congruence", the third of Roger's (1990) core conditions, a subject which I also described to the group as authenticity, genuineness or honesty.

Before we embarked on the exploration of this topic, however, we undertook an appraisal of the course so far. As I explained above I introduced this acknowledged assessment of progress at the half-way stage because my co-researchers had concentrated on the acquisition of counselling skills, leaving the research aspects to me. Small group flip-chart work revealed the following:

Fears regarding self-disclosure, non-achievement or making a fool of themselves had gone completely, although there was still some insecurity about the use of role-play and writing on the flip-chart sheets. There was a **new fear** of allowing people to "open up" and not knowing how to cope with their self-disclosure.

Hopes had included the hope to be a "better counsellor". Having learned the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills they would now like to substitute this with the hope to become a "better listener".

Achievements self-reported by the group:

1. A better insight into counselling.
2. An awareness of clients' body language as well as their own.
3. A more responsive attitude to clients and staff.
4. An increased awareness of the problems and feelings of others, including "hidden" problems.
5. A greater understanding of others' problems.
6. An ability to learn from each other.
7. An ability to use open ended questions constructively.
8. An increase in self-confidence.
9. Have become a better, more understanding person.
10. Further study - Yes! - a nice taster.

During further, whole group, discussion Gillian told us that she had always felt that she was "the stupid one", but now realised that this was far from true. She knows that she has "a lot to offer".

Cynthia had already thought, before joining the course, that support groups were a good idea and was now even more convinced. She would like to continue in such a group if possible.

Pam had not previously seen the need for support groups, but could now accept how different they can be from the peer support upon which she had been relying. She would now consider joining a group if one were subsequently formed.

Pam also expressed her appreciation of being helped to access feelings which she had been repressing. She felt this increased self-knowledge was liberating.

Pat described how privileged she feels when people "open up" to her. She said that it made her feel "humble".

The above described mid-way appraisal showed a general feeling of satisfaction at having moved on considerably with the aid of worthwhile activities.

The actual exercises exploring congruence which were the learning section of Session 6 were very successful. They showed that the group members were aware of their use of body language and that they were willing to share self-disclosure. Their presentations illustrating their current lives showed that they all felt secure in their home environments, while most of their stresses were work related. Several claimed that they were at a turning point in their lives (Chris, Pat, Pam, Gill and Mandy) and money problems were present to some degree for all members.

I queried the effect it had on the small group activities when I moved around among them while they were working. It was reassuring to be told that they did not notice whether

I was there or not, I was accepted as part of the group and did not inhibit them at all. I feel that my acceptance as an equal participant enhances the validity of this research and suggests that I had achieved the status of co-researcher, not of directive expert.

During the closing review Gillian shared with the group the stresses of her previous work as a nurse in an Accident And Emergency Unit. She explained how, in order to survive, she and her colleagues needed to "make a joke of everything". She also shared her new appreciation of how cynical this had made her and how the counselling skills course was helping her to lose that cynicism.

Session 7 involved the use of the "Johari Window" (Luft and Ingham, 1955) to aid deeper self-knowledge, together with work on concreteness and sensitive challenging.

At the opening review Cynthia talked about her Crossroads Scheme's involvement with terminally ill clients and the stresses which this caused. She received a great deal of support from the other group members and obviously benefitted from "getting things off her chest". There followed a general discussion about the feeling of support that everyone experienced as part of our regular meetings.

After a centring, relaxation, exercise and work with the Johari Window the plenary section revealed that group members were happy about sharing their positive side, but

preferred to conceal their negative side from themselves as well as others.

My "concreteness" demonstration had to be shortened because Pam, as part of an innocuous description of her journey to work, introduced the topic of euthanasia and became very emotional. A good example of the use of open ended questions to help a client to focus, which ultimately needed careful handling to return Pam to a sense of equilibrium.

The "challenging" exercise involved role-play for the first time and brought about the first real challenge to my leadership! Pat got quite angry. She did not seem to want to understand the difference between self-revelation and role-play, protesting strongly that I had told them not to choose subjects for discussion that affected them too deeply. I apologised for not explaining the exercise clearly enough, but wondered privately if the role which Pat had drawn had connected with some personal concern.

I feel that a great deal of self-development took place and self-knowledge was enhanced during this session, in addition to the skills exploration. However, the final review was mainly taken up with me placating Pat, so there was little feed-back about how the exercises had affected the other members.

Session 8 concerned Egan's (1990) three stage approach to counselling. The exercises explored immediacy, aims and objectives, goal setting and action plans.

There had been a two week gap since the previous session and again I hoped for evidence of "action in the field". I was not so disappointed on this occasion; three people had interesting reports for the opening review.

Cynthia told of using her counselling skills with a bereaved carer, also with the Care Attendant who had been helping the family concerned. She felt that she had added considerably to her previous skills.

Chris told of helping her sister-in-law by listening rather than advising. This led to a further discussion about the differences between giving advice, using counselling skills and actual counselling. We agreed that to counsel a relative would not be ethical, but to use the relevant counselling skills could not be anything other than helpful.

Gillian told of her dealings with an aggressive carer, whose son was disabled due to physical abuse as a baby. Gill was aware that previously she would have bristled and probably would have been aggressive in return. Instead she held back and accessed the awareness that the mother had a long-standing need to talk to someone. Gill was then able to offer non-judgemental acceptance which was rewarded by

the trust of the carer. This scenario illustrated a dramatic change of approach for Gillian.

Also part of the opening review was another discussion about the lack of success of Session 7's role-play. Group members felt that they had better results when using real problems. However, this session's role-play went well. Cynthia was particularly convincing when portraying challenging in an everyday situation, helping to show the dangers of taking challenging too far.

At the end-of-session review only four people reported back on setting a goal and making an action plan:

Pam stated that she is going to start on some tapestry;

Gillian described how she is going to work on a new plan for her garden;

Linda intends to repolish an antique table;

Mandy had set a goal and made an action plan while working with her "counsellor", but did not wish to share them with the whole group.

Mandy's demeanour when she explained that decision was an excellent illustration of how her confidence had grown within this group. She was defending her right to make choices.

Session 9 was designated in the Training Manual as an open session and the group had asked for some input on the grieving process. "Brainstorming" exercises helped the group to put together lists of physical symptoms, normal feelings and cultural rituals connected with bereavement.

The second half of Session 9 was used for working in pairs in a simulated counselling relationship.

The first half of the session went well. There was a mutuality about the depth at which the group wanted to investigate the topic of bereavement and they were happy with the results. These results are shown as Appendix 6. The group members fully appreciated that to use their newly acquired counselling skills as an experiential exercise connected with loss and grief would have been neither safe nor appropriate.

I was not happy myself about the second half of the session. It felt restless and noisy. This feeling might have been due to the fact that I worked as part of a pair and could not properly observe what the other group members were experiencing.

At the closing review Pam produced her tapestry work to show that at least two of her stated aims from Session 8 had been achieved.

Before my co-researchers left I distributed the course appraisal sheets as published in the Training Manual, asking that they be returned the following week. Copies of these appraisal sheets are included as Appendix 7.

Session 10 was designed to provide a comfortable ending for the course and a group appraisal of what had been learned.

At the opening review it became clear that Session 9's work on bereavement had been generally useful, but particularly so for Irene and Maureen. They had both felt better equipped to help clients who had suffered a recent loss.

My fears about the usefulness of the paired counselling activity proved to be unfounded; all had seen it as an enhancement to previous learning on the course. The group was fairly united, however, in reporting their dislike of the challenging and goal-setting activities of Sessions 7 and 8. They felt that there had not been enough explanation or preparation.

On looking back I find myself wondering if this was because the way these topics were presented in the course was not entirely in line with my own mainly Person-Centred approach. Perhaps I should have had the courage to introduce my own exercises at this stage, but I felt that to follow the prescribed course would assist the presentation of my research.

After this opening review I asked the group members to complete the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale for the second time, to date it and number it, and to store it in their ring binder for future use. I also tried to collect the appraisal forms which had been distributed at the end of Session 9. Only Sue and Gillian had got them with them. Fortunately I had anticipated this kind of response and had come prepared with stamped self-addressed envelopes. Pat never returned her form. She suffered a close family

bereavement a few days after the end of the course and I did not wish to put her under any pressure. It was five weeks after the course was completed before I managed to get the other seven forms returned. I will attempt to precis these appraisal form responses as part of the "Results" chapter which follows.

Session 10's work on endings showed a good understanding of the counselling process, listing a range of anticipated feelings from fear and loss to enhanced self-confidence.

When asked to choose their method of evaluation the group members actually chose to work in small groups and record their findings on flip-chart sheets. One of their early fears seemed to have disappeared. Pat and Mandy both volunteered to act as scribes.

My evaluation suggestions were taken directly from the Training Manual:

1. What have I learned about myself?
2. What have I learned about counselling?
3. What have I learned about this group?
4. How will I use all this knowledge?
5. What will I do differently?

The actual flip-chart self-report lists are shown as part of Appendix 8. The findings of these lists will be presented more appropriately under the following "Results" chapter heading.

As well as completing the self-report charts there was verbal reporting during the final plenary session:

Cynthia claimed to feeling greater self-respect. She got no feed-back at work to give her any realisation of her own worth. The counselling skills course had given her the opportunity to discuss her work, its problems and its place in the community.

This view was supported by the whole group, with particularly strong expressions of agreement from Pat and Chris. There was a universal feeling that everyone was now more willing to give themselves credit for what they did - "we do a good job".

Pat described her responsibility for sharing her own time between forty clients. There was no real recognition of the difficulty of this task by her funding authority and she had appreciated sharing her problems.

Pat also told us that she had joined the group not realising that everyone has problems presented by life. It was reassuring to find that she was not alone.

Irene said that she realised that she had not made as articulate a contribution to the course as other members, but she felt that she had benefitted just as much. She was assured that her non-verbal responses, as well as her quiet verbal responses, had made her a valuable member of the group.

Mandy felt that she had been a poor listener before the course. She had never sat still or paid proper attention to the speaker.

Sue described her appreciation of the support she had gained from the group during the course, but also anticipated gaining future help from individuals. She now felt confident that she could approach any one of the other nine members and receive willing support.

These feelings were echoed throughout the group.

Follow-up Session: three months later.

Two weeks before this meeting was to be held I sent the group members a reminder of the date and time, together with a copy of the introduction to this piece of research. I felt that the planned two-and-a-half hour review session would be more rewarding if, at this stage, my co-researchers came prepared with some ideas for feed-back. In the letter I asked them to consider whether the course had had any lasting effect on them, their life or the way they perceived their work. This letter is included as Appendix 9.

Nine group members attended this final meeting. (Irene had telephoned to say that she was too ill to come). The session opened with a short discussion about how the participants felt at coming together again. It was generally agreed that it was good to be in a place where they could leave the stresses of their work behind and be

with people who offered them unconditional positive regard. After this discussion I led the group into a centring exercise.

When the relaxation exercise was over I asked the group members to complete the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale for the third time and hand all three completed Scales back to me. Only seven of those present were able to find all three copies. I sent a blank Scale to Irene who returned it to me within a week, together with her two previously completed Scales. The results from these completed forms are shown in the relevant chapter below.

The group members were then consulted about how they wanted to conduct this report-back session. They again chose to work in two smaller groups and record their findings on flip-chart sheets. I displayed a sheet which asked these groups to consider "what difference, if any, the course has made to:

1. you as a person;
2. you in your job; and
3. the way you do your job".

I also asked them to record any other thoughts they had about the effects of the course.

The records on the flip-chart sheets are included as Appendix 10 and will also be shown as part of the Results chapter below.

During the plenary review the whole group agreed that as a result of the course they all felt better about themselves - they were all O.K. people! The Crossroads staff felt that a counselling skills course should be part of the induction training for ALL co-ordinators. There was also a consensus that it was comforting to know that no-one was ever expected to know all the answers.

Maureen reported feeling the benefit of being able to remain calm in stressful situations.

Pat said that she had learned that on occasion giving advice could be hurtful. She also felt more confident and more aware of others' feelings. On a personal level she said that grief goes on, but counselling helps.

Chris picked up this cue to say that she had learned that it was "O.K." to say nothing when helping someone who had been bereaved; to be with them was sometimes enough. She, too, said that the course had made her more aware and confident; and she knew that she was a better listener.

Mandy felt that people had begun to recognise that she was a "listener" and that they valued her for this; she now avoided giving advice. She also said that the support which she had received in the group was invaluable and that she would like to continue in a support group if that were possible.

Cynthia put forward the opinion that many people see the admission of the need for support as a sign of weakness,

but the benefits were clear. She wondered if co-ordinators were the right people to give emotional support to their own staff.

Sue confessed to having taken some time to appreciate the degree of trust it was possible to share when working in a group. She felt that some people needed to be "trained" to accept support. I felt that she was including herself in that group of people, but she did now accept that structured support groups were beneficial.

Gillian felt that she had learned to be less aggressive and not to give unwanted advice. She also knew that she did not have to take responsibility for other people's problems; she "didn't have to solve it".

Linda had used her counselling skills most often in informal, family, situations and felt that family life was easier because of her self-development.

Pam was not able to make her usual valuable contribution as her mother had been admitted to hospital that morning and Pam's mind was not really with us.

This last remark about Pam is one confirmation of my expectation that in reporting the progress of each session and commenting on the outcomes I would often touch upon sensitive and personal material. It was at this stage that I sent each of the course members a copy of this chapter, seeking their comments and offering to change all of the

names to assumed names if they wished me to. I attach the accompanying letter as Appendix 11.

There were one or two requests that I should change the actual wording I had used when reporting what individual group members had said, but no dissent with any of the content. Overall the responses which I received were very favourable and the group members saw no problem in my using their real names as part of this research report.

I was again grateful for their time and co-operation as another illustration of the cyclical nature of this research was provided.

RESULTS.

Owing to the nature of the research it has not been possible to draw a distinct line between the progress of the course and the results of the intervention. Beneficial results have been demonstrated in the session by session reviews, as well as during the acknowledged appraisal opportunities. However, I will attempt to draw these subjective threads together into a coherent picture.

Before I undertake this task it is possible to present the results of the one objective measure employed: The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.

Of the ten participants who completed the course only eight presented all three sheets at the end of Session 10. Despite the fact that I had given each of the course members a ring binder in which to keep any paperwork - trying to anticipate the almost certain knowledge that someone would lose their completed questionnaires - two individuals claimed to have lost the Self Esteem Scale which they completed during Session 1.

This clearly illustrates the statement by Rowan and Reason (1994) that as research progresses fewer and fewer questionnaires are handed in, because the subjects do not see the relevance of the questions. It may also be seen to echo the belief of Heron (1994b) that it is wrong to assume that the questionnaire will reflect the norms and values of the participants. Perhaps there could also be a suggestion

of co-researchers demonstrating that they did not feel that completing a questionnaire was in keeping with my professed research approach - but this is only conjecture on my part.

Participants were given the option of submitting the Scale sheets anonymously, and this they did.

ROSENBERG SELF ESTEEM SCALE RESULTS			
Subject number	Session 1 20/01/95 score	Session 10 13/04/95 score	Follow-up 13/07/95 score
1	8	12	14
2	6	7	11
3	11	11	13
4	8	14	12
5	11	11	10
6	6	18	16
7	6	11	9
8	9	10	10
9	/	12	10
10	/	8	10

From the above results one can see that for six of the participants who returned all three questionnaires there was a rise in self-esteem rating between Session 1 of the course and Session 10. Although for three of those individuals there was a fall in score by the follow-up review date their final rating was still higher than at the beginning of the course.

I make no attempt here to convert these raw scores into any form of statistical finding because my sample was very small and I had no control group. None-the-less, it is apparent from the above results that participating in the course did have a beneficial effect on the self-esteem of my co-researchers. I still bear in mind, however, Chris's remark that how she filled in the form would depend on how she felt on the day. There was never any doubt that the course members enjoyed the hours which they spent together; there is a chance that they lifted each others' self-esteem when they were together.

Despite my doubts about traditional research findings I feel that, in terms of the validity of this study, it would be significant if the results in the above table are substantiated by my co-researchers' self-reporting. This I will now attempt to bring together in some sort of order and present it below.

The above mentioned self-reporting by my co-researchers falls into three categories: self-report during group discussion, group self-report as part of acknowledged appraisal sessions and self-report by means of the course appraisal forms. It seems logical, therefore, that this chapter should continue within these categories.

1. Self-report during group discussion.

These results are mainly in the form of individual's observations about their own progress and I have chosen to

present them under headings which reflect the purpose of this research project.

Self-esteem:

- (a) As early as Session 2 (Page 32) the group members showed an appreciation of the skills which they all needed in order to carry out their work in the community, acknowledging that they possessed them.
- (b) Session 5 (Page 36) found Mandy describing her satisfaction at being more at ease when dealing with people. Also during this session (Page 37) Pat was considerably encouraged by the realisation that not only had she gained understanding regarding the concept of open ended questions, she used them quite skilfully on numerous occasions.
- (c) In Session 6 (Page 39) Gillian described a new understanding that she "has a lot to offer", being able to dismiss her previous belief that she was "the stupid one". She also claimed a loss of cynicism (Page 41).
- (d) In Session 10 (Page 48) Cynthia identified a feeling of greater self-respect, this gained agreement from all the other group members. In the same session Pat recognised that she did a difficult job most successfully and also expressed the realisation that she was not alone in having problems.

- (e) The final, follow-up session (Page 51), found the group members in complete agreement that they "felt better about themselves".

Although not strictly speaking "self-report" findings expressed by members of the group I would like to add here my own observations:

- (a) During Session 4 (Page 35) Mandy's increased self-esteem showed in a more relaxed manner and an ability to join in group discussions.
- (b) At the end of Session 8 (Page 44) Mandy demonstrated a greater valuing of her 'self' when she made the choice not to share her one-to-one experience.
- (c) In Session 10 (Page 47) the whole group showed an increased appreciation of self-worth when they chose to display their findings on flip charts; no longer being afraid of poor spelling or writing - realising that their contributions were valued.

Self-development:

Items within this section may already have been mentioned above as illustrating increased self-esteem. I make no apology, however, for including them again as I feel they have real relevance to the outcome of my research.

- (a) Session 2 (Page 32) found Cynthia describing increased awareness of her interaction with other people, while Gillian (Page 33) could already appreciate that

putting things into words helped her to see them more clearly.

- (b) During Session 4 (Page 34) Pam reported having enjoyed being able to say things which she had never said before, showing a willingness to self-disclose and bring about self-development.
- (c) Session 5 (Page 38) contained an activity which involved group members in rating their own personal attributes. The whole group reported that they had learned a lot about themselves.
- (d) During Session 6 (Page 40) Pam expressed her appreciation of being helped to access repressed feelings - she felt that increased self-knowledge was "liberating". Within this same session Pat felt able to share aspects of her character and I observed that the whole group showed self-awareness and an increasing willingness to self-disclose. Also in Session 6 (Page 41) Gillian revealed an awareness of her past attitudes and how her approach to life was changing.
- (e) In Session 7 (Page 42), thanks to my demonstration of "concreteness", Pam accessed a depth of emotion on the subject of euthanasia of which she had previously been unaware and Pat showed a new ability to express anger in a group situation. My own observation about this

session was that a great deal of self-development and self-knowledge took place.

- (f) Session 8 (Page 43) showed that Chris was now able to describe herself as a listener rather than a helper and Gillian described how she has become less aggressive and less judgemental.
- (g) During the "Follow-up" session (Page 51) Maureen described a new ability to remain calm in difficult situations, while Chris reported being more confident and more aware of others' feelings. Pat also felt this greater awareness of others and had gained a knowledge that "grief goes on but counselling helps". Gillian again described her less aggressive stance and Linda felt that family life had become easier because of her self-development (Page 52).

Job satisfaction:

- (a) Again as early as Session 2 (Page 32) Cynthia appeared to speak for the whole group when she described an increased awareness when dealing with other people, particularly those she came into contact with as part of her work in the community. There was also a group consensus that their jobs required particular skills and that these skills were "something special".
- (b) In Session 5 (Page 36) Pam described how her new skills enabled her to help a client explore their needs, finding this most rewarding; Mandy reported

being more comfortable when dealing with staff and clients; Pat (Page 37) was encouraged by the understanding that she was not required to find absolute solutions to other people's problems; Maureen had found it easier to deal with a Care Attendant whom she confessed to finding extremely difficult.

(c) During Session 6 (Page 40) Pat shared her satisfaction and humility in being with a client and helping her "open up".

(d) Session 8 (Page 43) found Cynthia describing her use of counselling skills when helping a client who had recently been bereaved; she felt that she had added considerably to her previous skills. In this session Gillian also expressed appreciation of her new approach to dealing with difficult situations within her work.

(e) In Session 10 (Page 48) Pat described a recognition of the difficulties of her job and how she worked to overcome them. There was also a universal agreement among the group members - "we do a good job".

(f) During the follow-up session (Page 51) Mandy expressed satisfaction that, within her job, she had been recognised as a good listener.

Above has been shown, by self-report and my own observations, increases in self-esteem and job satisfaction and considerable steps toward self development. An

experiential learning of counselling skills is also demonstrated as the group worked together to bring about these changes.

2. Group self-report during appraisal sessions.

Here I will limit myself to presenting the group findings.

Session 6: achievements reported by the group members:

1. A better insight into counselling.
2. An awareness of clients' body language.
3. A more responsive attitude to clients and staff.
4. An increased awareness of the problems and feelings of others, including "hidden" problems.
5. A greater understanding of others' problems.
6. An ability to learn from each other.
7. An ability to use open ended questions constructively.
8. An increase in self confidence.
9. The hope to become a better, more understanding, person had been realised.
10. The hope for an introduction to the idea of further study had been realised. There had been a "nice taster".

Session 10: achievements reported by group members:

1. An ability to make better responses and ask more open ended questions.
2. An ability to listen and be aware of what is being said, including body language.
3. Increased confidence.
4. Recognition of self achievement.
5. Ability to cope.

6. No longer afraid to express feelings.
7. Realisation that each individual is of equal value.
8. Realisation that we are all nice people.

Follow-up Session: "Brainstorm":

Flip chart responses from "Mandy's Group":

More patient; think before you speak; listen with more awareness; conscious of own/others' body language and facial expressions; accept your own limitations; recognise the need to off-load and receive on-going support; would like to go on training.

Flip chart responses from "Maureen's Group":

Calming situations; analysing another's words of advice; not as aggressive; more aware of other's words, moods etc; more self-awareness; putting yourself in the picture, i.e. making space for yourself; not making space for yourself in other people's concerns; don't go in feet first; more eye contact; more physical contact.

3. Self-report by means of course appraisal form.

Here I will attempt to give a summary of the sections of the appraisal forms which are relevant to this research project.

In answer to the question

"Before you began the course what did you hope to get out of it?"

the following answers were given:

- (a) I hoped to learn how to handle difficult situations and being able to ask the right questions to the families we go into.
- (b) To have a better understanding of counselling, what it involves and why it is necessary.
- (c) Learn how to listen. Understanding of basic counselling skills.
- (d) An understanding of what is the benefit of counselling and if I could achieve the skills needed to go further.
- (e) A refresher on forgotten, unused skills and to learn additional skills.
- (f) An introduction to counselling and the skills involved.
- (g) More insight into what counselling was all about and to increase my ability to understand and listen to people's problems.
- (h) Greater skills in helping clients.
- (i) My aim was to be able to deal with my clients more effectively, and to strengthen my weaknesses.

When asked to what extent these hopes had been realised five participants replied "A great deal", giving their reasons for this response as:

- (a) I have learnt a great deal by thinking a lot more before asking a question. Mainly to listen more carefully about what the person is saying and how it is being said.
- (b) With very little previous knowledge or experience, I now find that I can apply the skills I have learned, both at home and at work, to achieve a great deal of satisfaction from situations where I would previously have felt I had failed.
- (c) I have learned to ask open ended questions and to listen better.
- (d) I have learned about myself and my abilities.
- (e) No reason given.

Two participants entered "quite a lot" in answer to the same question and gave as their reasons:

- (f) I gained much from the course but would like to know more.
- (g) I feel I now have a broader understanding of counselling and I have improved my listening skills and responses.

The final two participants entered the response "Partly" and gave as their reason for doing so:

- (h) I see the course as a starting point for developing these skills, which I hope will develop further with use.
- (i) Apart from listening skills, the other counselling skills do not apply to me at the moment, as my job has changed a great deal. I would perhaps only see a client once, to deliver equipment, and there is very little time to sit and chat.

Asked to indicate the relevance of the course to personal needs five marked their response "Very high", giving as their reasons:

- (a) It is very important to go on these courses when dealing with the client group as we do. These are in a lot of cases very desperate people with all sorts of problems. Sometimes just being a good listener and being able to understand their situation can help a great deal.
- (b) I have found that most people will open up to me now. It has increased my confidence and made my job and home life easier.
- (c) I have been made aware of my qualities which will help me in my work.
- (d) I now feel more confident and competent in my day-to-day dealings with those who want/need to talk.
- (e) Skills can be used every day at home and work.

In answer to the same question two responded with "High" relevance, giving as their reasons:

- (f) I have been able to get people to talk to me both in my job and voluntary work, and I find I now cope much better.
- (g) My clients sometimes have problems associated with depression and feelings of isolation and I now feel I am in a better position to help them.

One participant perceived "Moderate" relevance, saying:

I am unable to build up a relationship with many clients because of my change in job structure.

The final participant saw "Low" relevance, giving the reason as:

I feel resistant to sharing my personal problems in a group situation.

The only other question on the appraisal forms which has real relevance to this research project was the one which asked:

"As a result of doing this course what have you learned about yourself? How have you changed?"

The answers were as follows:

- (a) I am a more confident person. I have become more aware of other people's need to talk and by genuinely listening, or asking subtle questions, I can make people feel better about themselves.
- (b) I have a good sense of other people and I am not judgemental. I now try not to feel I must put everything to rights.
- (c) I have more positive thoughts about myself.
- (d) I think a lot more about the questions I ask. For example the value of them, am I listening properly, am I collecting the right information and not just what I want to hear?
- (e) I am quick to judge others. I am more aware and sensitive to people's problems.

- (f) I have learned to listen better to other people. It has helped me to come to terms with my mum's death and enabled me to discuss my feelings with my family.
- (g) I feel I have become a better listener and able to respond to people in a more thoughtful and positive way.
- (h) I have learned that some things taught on this course I do automatically, and this has given me reassurance. I feel that I try to listen more to what is said to me, and not try to answer a question before the questioner has finished speaking!
- (i) That I am not very good at talking about myself in public. But taking into account others' similar feelings, perhaps one should be less reticent.

In support of support groups.

I believe that the above results show a constant thread of growth and self-development, which includes greater self-esteem and job satisfaction. In addition to these factors there was an intimation that my original remit of the benefits of support groups for Crossroads' workers itself gained support from my co-researchers.

In Session 6 Cynthia said that she joined the group already believing in the benefits of structured support meetings, and was now even more convinced. In Session 7 Cynthia repeated this theme, citing how much support she was getting from this present group. Pam then said that she had not before seen any benefit, but was now converted and would join a support group if one was set up. There was then general agreement from all group members present that they had enjoyed the support they had received as part of this course.

The final accolade for support groups came when Sue, during Session 10, said that she could now accept that they were beneficial. As we wound down at the end of the follow-up session there was a request that the group should meet on a monthly basis so that the mutual support could continue. Cynthia expressed the opinion that the supply of support should come from outside any particular Crossroads Scheme, while Sue felt that people, herself included, needed to be "trained" to accept support.

Final step in the cycle of reflection.

Once again I provided my co-researchers with a chapter of this project for their perusal and comments. They were each sent a copy of this "Results" chapter and invited to contact me by post or telephone with their comments; or, if they wished, to reconvene for one last discussion (See appendix 12 for covering letter).

Other commitments prevented all but two of my group members from coming together for a final meeting. I was, however, contacted by all of those who could not attend.

Thus we came to the last move in our cyclic process.

There was again a sense of accord with my record of events. Course members agreed to a greater awareness of themselves and others; self development which had led to increased self-esteem and self-confidence; and greater job satisfaction as they had learned new skills at the same time as being helped to appreciate their own worth. There

remains among my co-researchers a sense of well-being, commitment and a shared purpose in providing an acknowledged invaluable service to the community.

There is no doubt that the increases in self-esteem demonstrated by the scores obtained with the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale have been substantiated by my co-researchers' self-reporting. The group members have, indeed, experienced enhanced job-satisfaction, higher levels of self-esteem and feelings of well-being.

DISCUSSION.

I feel that I must begin this chapter with an acceptance that I have not completely achieved my ambition to emulate Reason (1994a) and Heron and Reason (1981, 1982) in setting up a co-operative inquiry. As early as Session 1 of the Counselling Skills Course I was able to identify the fact that few of my co-researchers had any real interest in academic research; their main concern was to acquire the skills which they felt that they needed for their work in the community.

This first view of the group members' attitude is substantiated by their responses to the various modes of evaluation. For example, even when they were asked the direct questions "What have you learned about yourself? How have you changed?", they responded mainly in terms of enhanced counselling skills; this despite my firm belief that they had experienced, and demonstrated, considerable personal growth and self-development.

When discussing experiential research methodology Heron (1994a) describes a continuum for both the research initiator and the co-researchers. The researcher can participate fully in the activity which is being researched, act as an observer only, or take a position between these two stand-points. I feel that I was accepted as a full member of the group, yet acted as a facilitator in the learning of counselling skills. This probably

placed me on a mid-point between participation and observation.

According to Heron (1994a) the contribution of the subjects to the research propositions such as the guiding hypothesis and discussion may be strong, weak, or zero. It is strong if the subjects are fully fledged co-researchers taking an equal part in the creative thinking that generates, accompanies, and concludes the research. It is weak if they are merely consulted by the researcher and given the opportunity to agree or disagree with any findings. It is zero if they only take part in the activity being researched.

In light of the above analysis, although my original intention was otherwise, I feel that my participants must be seen as having made a weak contribution to the research propositions. I do not feel, however, that these positions on the continua affect the validity of my findings.

When describing their attempts to ensure validity Heron and Reason (1982) identify five criteria. The first of these is fulfilled by the rigour imposed through a cyclic process, with a series of corrective feedback loops and progressive checking and re-checking with the group members. This I feel I achieved through appraisal activities at Session 6, Session 10 and the follow-up session, backed up by the responses on the printed appraisal forms. Further re-checking can be seen to have taken place when the "Progress of the course" and the

"Results" chapters were sent to the group members for their comments. In all of these respects my "co-researchers" supported my findings.

The second of Heron and Reasons' (1982) criteria for validity was the ability of the research group to manage its own counter-transference. This was a concept which I did not attempt to introduce to my group, as I felt that they were already coping with enough new concepts in gaining counselling skills. Since Heron's group of professional academics never resolved the dilemmas presented by dealing with counter-transference I do not feel at all remiss in not discussing it.

Avoidance of consensus collusion, Heron and Reasons' (1982) third criteria of validity, was an aspect of which I was aware from the outset. It was for this reason that I did not feel able to share with my subjects the range of effects which I hoped to evaluate. Since they never became co-researchers in the full sense it was not appropriate to appoint a "devil's advocate", which is what Heron suggests as a measure to avoid consensus collusion. However I feel that Sue's initial reluctance to share and grow placed her, unwittingly, in that role. Also, at a later stage, the prompting and questioning of my research tutor could at times be seen as coming from a (benign) devil's advocate.

A degree of authentic collaboration, Heron and Reasons' (1982) fourth criteria, was demonstrated in the appraisal

sessions when my co-researchers chose to work together to present their progress.

I feel that the fifth criteria, which calls for a balance between inquiry/reflection and experience/growth, was well covered during this project. Perhaps there was more inquiry/reflection on my part than came from the participants, but they shared in this and the project formed a rounded whole.

Allied to the above question of validity is the matter of the reliability of my results. My use of the reports and observations by myself and the participants, together with the scores from the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, provide the "mix and match" which Robson (1993) sees as beneficial in some cases. I believe, too, that in using multiple sources of data: self-report, group presentations, appraisal forms and a self-esteem scale, I have achieved the triangulation which is deemed to give internal validity to results (Rudstam and Newton, 1992).

In making my claim for the validity of my inquiry method and the reliability of my results I bear in mind Robson's (1993) statement that it is important not to claim too much. I realise that the group with which I was working shared a mutual interest and formed a voluntary, homogeneous group which could be expected to work well together towards a common aim (Corey, 1990). It would be interesting to evaluate the progress of a more disparate group following the same counselling skills course.

I am also aware that I have a vested interest in the well-being of staff who are employed by the Crossroads organisation and that this may have influenced my facilitation of the counselling skills course, if not my analysis of the outcomes. That the course was being presented by a colleague who understood the difficulties of their daily task may have influenced the enhancement of self-esteem which was experienced by the Crossroads employees. These factors emphasise the importance of not claiming too much significance in my results. They may only be valid for this particular group.

Since completing the practical part of this project I have gained some experience in facilitating heterogeneous groups; their ability to work towards learning basic counselling skills has been interesting, at times challenging, and apparently successful. There was, however, no attempt to evaluate and record group members' personal growth. Corey (1990) claims that a heterogeneous group with a range of ages, backgrounds, interests and concerns provides the stimulation necessary for positive personal growth. Perhaps there are the seeds here for a comparable project in the future. It might even transpire that with less mutuality there would be a greater desire to become full co-researchers. However that may be it would seem that I can claim that my results would remain relevant primarily for voluntary, homogeneous groups whose members are committed to learning counselling skills in order to use them in their day-to-day occupations.

This claim does, in some measure, gain support from the findings of McArdle and McDermott (1994) whose research was seen as a trigger for the present study. They found that participation in a counselling skills training course brought about a significant positive change in self-perceived counselling and communication skills. At the end of the course the results also indicated that working in partnership with the families of children with special needs, rather than presenting as a professional expert, was beneficial to both clients and health professionals.

There has been no attempt in the present study to influence the way that the participants carried out their work in the community as there was in McArdle and McDermott's (1994) research. However, in both their study and mine, it has been shown that training produced positive changes in self-perceived counselling skills and the participants' self-esteem. To these joint findings this present study adds evidence of positive changes in job-satisfaction and emotional well-being.

A devil's advocate question which might now be appropriate could be to ask if it was necessary to provide a counselling skills course in order to bring about this degree of positive personal growth. Would it not have been sufficient to form a voluntary staff support group and facilitate its spontaneous interaction over a similar length of time? This was the direction of my original interest, but I had extreme difficulty in forming a support

group which would hold together for a sufficient number of sessions. If I could ever succeed in persuading the Crossroads organisation that support groups are beneficial for its staff I could attempt to evaluate the progress of such a group.

There is, however, evidence that gaining new skills does, in itself, promote job satisfaction, self development and self-esteem. Sylge (1995) lists attending courses and seminars as being one of the essentials for job satisfaction and the fulfilment of personal potential; while Storch (1991) sees the provision of education as crucial in fostering awareness and co-operation between those dealing with difficult situations. Yahne and Long (1995) also found that a series of sessions which incorporated skills learning, counselling and peer support increased the participants' self-esteem.

That the self-development which is associated with staff training enhances self-esteem is further explored by the research team of Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallee and Lehman (1996). They found that ongoing training enhanced self-concept clarity which then caused greater self-esteem.

All of the above show support for the provision of the opportunity for training and self-development among the staff of any organisation. To quote from Sylge:

"If your own needs do not take priority over the demands of your job at some point in your working year, the future and your role within it will be

inflexible and uncertain, your potential never quite fulfilled." Sylge, 1995, page 30.

Viewing the above literature it would seem that there is confirmation of my own beliefs concerning the outcomes of training in basic counselling skills with its attendant opportunities for self-development.

Heron (1982) holds that in healthy development there are three co-equal elements: to love and be loved; to understand and be understood; to choose and be chosen. I cannot claim to be experienced in the education of the affect, but have the hope that in presenting the course which has been an integral part of this research project I have encouraged the participants to take moves in the desired direction.

I further hope that I have facilitated within the participants movement toward Roger's (1990) ideal of the "fully functioning person".

CONCLUSION.

It has been shown within this project that a ten-session course in basic counselling skills, together with its integral opportunities for self-development and peer-group support, was instrumental in improving job-satisfaction, self-esteem and emotional well-being for the course participants.

The research method used, namely co-operative inquiry, led to the results being gathered in the form of self-report, group report, facilitator observation and completion of appraisal forms. The subjective results were re-inforced by scores from the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale and agreed by the group members.

These group members were employees drawn from two registered charitable organisations: The Chester, Cheshire and Clwyd Blind Welfare Association, and the Association of Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes. There were three Home Visitors from the Blind Welfare Association, five Crossroads Co-ordinators, one Crossroads Deputy Co-ordinator and one Crossroads Assistant Co-ordinator, all from the North West Region. Without their commitment and co-operation the project would not have been possible.

Further lines of research have been suggested within the "Discussion" chapter above. It would be interesting to carry out a similar project with a more disparate group, perhaps a group coming together with the intent of learning

counselling skills, but hailing from a variety of modes of employment. It might also be worthwhile to find some way of enlisting a staff support group willing to stay together for ten weekly sessions, in order to evaluate the self-development within a group providing support but no training. Thirdly, it would be interesting to use the same method of research to evaluate self-development within a group training for a completely different kind of skill.

The above three suggestions are, however, for some time in the future. At this stage it seems reasonable to claim that the stated beliefs concerning the outcomes of training in basic counselling skills for workers within the community, which formed the guiding hypothesis for this project, were justified.

Thus it has clearly been shown above that participation in a structured counselling skills course had a positive impact on the personal and professional development of a group of Crossroads Co-ordinators and Blind Welfare Society Home Visitors. A strong recommendation is now made that such a course should become an integral part of the initial training for similarly employed staff in both the organisations represented here. It also seems clear that the provision of staff support groups would be both welcome and beneficial.

The implementation of the experiential research programme which has brought about these findings has been challenging and rewarding. The researcher has, indeed, been involved

with a real-life situation and has grown and developed alongside her co-researchers.

A personal last word:

Having reached the end of this piece of work it is most interesting to note that I have chosen the research method which Lynch (1996) believes would be most consistent with my philosophical views. According to his categorisation I feel that my philosophy would best be described under his Perspective 3:

"There is an objective order and meaning in reality, but our knowledge of this is always constrained by our social context" (Lynch, 1996 page 146).

Lynch holds that with such a philosophy the researcher would see qualitative research methods as no less useful than quantitative methods. I must agree that I do, in fact, regard qualitative methods as a more preferable route to knowledge about the human person.

A further implication drawn by Lynch (1996) is that those with the philosophy described under Perspective 3 would favour the approach to Person-Centred Counselling as set out by Brian Thorne, rather than that of Carl Rogers. My own suggestion is that I adopt an approach to Person-Centred Counselling unique to Madeline Knight, gaining the courage to make that claim from Brazier's statement that:

"If we follow what he (Rogers) said, we are not following what he said, because what he said was that we should find our own way" (Brazier, 1994 page 9).

If, as Lynch suggests, research based on Perspective 3 has to seek truth, above has been presented the truth as I have seen it!

APPENDIX 1.

CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING THE FORMATION OF THE GROUP.

Introductory letter.

MADELINE A. KNIGHT - Counsellor

*Advanced Diploma in Counselling
Member of The British Association of Counselling*

Telephone & Fax:

19 December 1994

Dear

As you know I have been trying to get a group together to take part in a Counselling Skills Course so that I can use any outcomes as a basis for the research connected with my M.A. in Counselling Studies.

I have been approached by another Co-ordinator who would be interested in taking part herself if the group was made up of Co-ordinators rather than Care Attendants. This would be an excellent idea as far as I am concerned, so I am trying to find out if there are enough Co-ordinators who could spare the time. I need at least eight members to make the group workable.

The course I am offering is for ten three hour sessions. It is a well structured, recognised course and I am qualified to lead it as I have a teaching degree as well as my counselling qualification. I aim to start the course during the third week in January.

I enclose a stamped, addressed envelope and I would be grateful if you could use it to return the sheet provided, indicating whether or not you are interested in taking part. If you are there is also a table for you to show when the best time(s) would be for you to attend.

Thanks in advance for your help,

Yours sincerely,

Response form.

Co-ordinator's Name:.....

Crossroads scheme:.....

I am / am not interested in taking part in the proposed
Counselling Skills Course connected with M.A. research.
(Delete as appropriate)

If you are interested please tick boxes below to indicate
your preferred time(s).

The most convenient time for me to attend ten three hour
sessions would be:

	Morning 9.30 - 12.30	Afternoon 1.30 - 4.30	Evening 6.00 - 9.00
Monday		////////////////	
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday		////////////////	////////////////

Any queries please telephone. Assistant Co-ordinators
would be welcome.

App.1, cont.

Letter of confirmation as sent to Crossroads participants.

MADELINE A. KNIGHT - Counsellor

*Advanced Diploma in Counselling
Member of The British Association of Counselling*

Telephone & Fax:

7 January 1995

Dear

I am delighted that you feel able to take part in the Counselling Skills Course which I intend to use as the basis for the research connected with my M.A. I hope that the course will be of benefit to us both.

Thursday from 1.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. proved to be the time which was best for those who have agreed to take part. I had intended to start the course in the week beginning 16th January, 1995, but I see from my diary that Cheshire Schemes already have a "cluster" meeting on the Thursday of that week.

Consequently the Counselling Skills Course will start on Thursday, 26th January, 1995; taking place at 67, Liverpool Road, Chester from 1.30 to 4.30 p.m. each week. It will run for ten three hour sessions, but I will have to omit Thursdays 16th February and 23rd March as I have engagements on those days which I cannot avoid. The course, therefore, will finish on Thursday 13th April.

I enclose a sheet showing the course outline.

The other Crossroads participants are Gillian and her assistant Linda, Pam, Sue, Cynthia and Mandy There will also be five Home Visitors from the Chester, Cheshire and Clwyd Blind Welfare Society. I am really looking forward to working with this group.

Yours sincerely,

App. 1 cont.

Letter of confirmation as sent to Blind Welfare Society participants.

MADELINE A. KNIGHT - Counsellor

*Advanced Diploma in Counselling
Member of The British Association of Counselling*

Telephone & Fax:

7 January 1995

Dear

I am delighted that you feel able to take part in the Counselling Skills Course which I intend to use as the basis for the research connected with my M.A. in Counselling Studies. I hope that the course will be of benefit to us both.

The Course will start on Thursday, 26th January, 1995; taking place at 67, Liverpool Road, Chester from 1.30 to 4.30 p.m. each week. It will run for ten three hour sessions, but I will have to omit Thursdays 16th February and 23rd March as I have engagements on those days which I cannot avoid. The course, therefore, will finish on Thursday 13th April.

I enclose a sheet showing the course outline and look forward to meeting you on the 26th.

Yours sincerely,

Madeline Knight

App. 1 cont.

Course plan, outline of the course:

26/01/95	Session 1:	Getting to know each other.
02/02/95	Session 2:	The features of a counselling relationship.
09/02/95	Session 3:	Empathy.
23/02/95	Session 4:	Responding skills.
02/03/95	Session 5:	Acceptance.
09/03/95	Session 6:	Being authentic.
16/03/95	Session 7:	The skills of challenge and immediacy.
30/03/95	Session 8:	Goal setting and problem solving.
06/04/95	Session 9:	Open.
13/04/95	Session 10:	Review and ending.

APPENDIX 2

COURSE PHILOSOPHY

The course seeks to introduce two broad concepts:

- (a) that counselling involves the self of the counsellor,
- (b) that counselling involves specific skills.

"These objectives are reflected in the course in the following ways. First, the earlier sessions (2 to 6) are structured so that they primarily involve an examination of what Carl Rogers (1951) called the core personal conditions which the counsellor needs to express. These are critical if a relationship based on trust and caring is to develop. These core characteristics are Empathy, Warmth and Genuineness. However, many people now argue that these personal dispositions are most likely to be effective if embedded in the practice of specific skills. In this context the work of Gerard Egan (1982) has been particularly influential. In Session 4, 7 and 8 in particular the course seeks to develop the notion of counselling as involving the practice of specific skills employed at specific stages of the helping process. Overall, therefore, there is an attempt to integrate a study of the core personal characteristics of the counsellor (inspired by Rogers) with an examination of specific counselling skills. That is the educational logic."

Ray Woolfe, 1989, Counselling Skills: A Training Manual, pub. Scottish Health Education Group, page 36.

Carl R. Rogers, 1951, Client Centered Therapy, pub. Constable.

Gerard Egan, 1982, The Skilled Helper, pub. Brooks/Cole.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COURSE

The combination of skills training and development of self-awareness is reflected in the following Aims and Objectives for the course.

AIMS:

- (a) to introduce students to some of the basic skills of counselling and to offer them an opportunity to practice these skills;
- (b) to introduce students to the idea that counselling is not something which is done TO people or FOR people, but is rather a way of being WITH people;
- (c) to provide a safe group context in which communication is open, a spirit of co-operation is developed and experiences can be accepted and shared;
- (d) to facilitate student learning about self, and to develop self-awareness, particularly in relation to the core personal conditions of counselling: empathy, warmth and genuineness;
- (e) To assist students to explore the application of counselling skills to their "work" settings.

OBJECTIVES, by the end of the course students will:

- (a) have practised, and be better able to use, some of the basic skills of counselling;
- (b) understand the meaning of the three core conditions of counselling and be aware of how these characteristics are expressed in their own personal dispositions as helpers;
- (c) acknowledge and demonstrate the difference between telling people what to do and being a facilitator;
- (d) be more aware of their own feelings and how these influence the nature of their interactions with other people;
- (e) be able to recognise (i) how feelings (emotions) are expressed non-verbally, and (ii) the way in which feelings underlie the context of what others say;
- (f) have evaluated the potential of their own "work" setting for the practice of counselling skills.

APPENDIX 3.

CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY.

This is a type of research carried out with people and for people, rather than on people.

"The simplest description of co-operative inquiry is that it is a way of doing research in which all those involved contribute both to the creative thinking that goes into the enterprise - deciding on what is to be looked at, the methods of inquiry, and making sense of what is found out - and also contribute to the action which is the subject of the research. Thus in its fullest form the distinction between researcher and subject disappears, and all who participate are both co-researchers and co-subjects. Co-operative inquiry is therefore also a form of education, personal development and social action."

Peter Reason, Page 1, Human Inquiry In Action, Sage, 1994.

APPENDIX 4.

Flip-chart work from Session One.

Group 1.

Fears: Writing on flip chart.
Self-conscious about role-play.

Hopes and expectations: Better insight into counselling.
Ability to apply what is learned to working lives.
Catalyst onto "bigger" things, such as more counselling training.
More self-confidence/self-assurance.
Learning from each other.
Meeting new people.
Learning route from Chester to Congleton.

Group 2.

Fears: Writing on flip-chart/spelling.
Role-play.
Making a fool of oneself.
Expose too much about personal life/feelings.

Hopes and expectations: Gain knowledge.
More responsive to clients/staff.
To be able to listen and respond if necessary.
To understand other's feelings.

Why take part? Interest in counselling.
To enable us to say the right thing at the right time - if possible!

Group 3.

Fears: Self-exposure.
Role-play.
Not achieving anything.
Too difficult homework/theory.
Making a fool of oneself.

Hopes and expectations: Be a better counsellor.
Be a better person.
To provide a "taster" which encourages further study.
Improve confidence.

APPENDIX 5.

MADELINE'S CLASS OF '95

2nd February, 1995 - Group definition of counselling:

Counselling entails giving others the self-confidence and awareness to find the most suitable solution to their problems. It is a tool to enable a person to talk their problem through with a neutral person in neutral surroundings, without any pressure.

The aim of counselling is to enable the client to express themselves, while ensuring confidentiality and treating the client with respect and dignity at all times.

B.A.C. DEFINITION

People become engaged in counselling when a person, occupying regularly or temporarily the role of counsellor, offers or agrees explicitly to offer time, attention and respect to another person or persons temporarily in the role of client.

The task of counselling is to give the client an opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and toward greater well-being.

APPENDIX 6

THE PROCESSES OF BEREAVEMENT

Group contributions, backed up by theory from Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy, by J. William Worden, Routledge, 1992.

RITUALS: Funeral service; flowers; condolences; grave stone; visits to grave; "stiff-upper-lip" (British culture).

It was thought that the hiding of feelings which is part of our present culture often hinders the normal grieving process.

PHYSICAL SENSATIONS: loss of appetite; insomnia; symptoms of having the "same thing"; swings of emotion; crying; pains; breathlessness; dry mouth; lack of energy; weakness in the muscles; comfort eating; indigestion; hollowness in the stomach; tightness across chest; tightness in the throat; headaches; sense of depersonalisation - remoteness from reality.

NORMAL FEELINGS: sadness; anger; guilt; regret; emptiness; self-reproach; denial; numbness; anxiety; shock; relief; emancipation; loneliness; fatigue; fear of having "the same thing"; fear of inadequacy; helplessness; confusion; yearning.

APPENDIX 7

EVALUATION OF THE COURSE AS A WHOLE

1 Before you began the course what did you hope to get out of it?

2(a) To what extent have these hopes been realised?

A great deal

Quite a lot

Partly (TICK ONE STATEMENT)

Not very much

Hardly at all

2(b) Reason for ticking particular statement?

3(a) Relevance of course to personal needs:

Very high

High

Moderate (TICK ONE STATEMENT)

Low

Very low

3(b) Reason for ticking particular statement?

App.7, cont.

4 What I found most interesting about this course
 (please list):

5 What I found least interesting about this course
 (please list):

6 Suggestions for revision of this course:

7 My own future training needs:

8 Any other comments:

App. 7, cont.

EVALUATION OF PERSONAL LEARNING AND FUTURE PLANS

- 1 As a result of doing this course, what have you learned about yourself? How have you changed?
- 2 As a result of doing this course, what have you learned about counselling?
- 3 What plans for the next six months do you have to improve your work as a counsellor?
- 4 List your strengths as a counsellor - areas to build upon:
- 5 List your less strong areas as a counsellor - areas to be worked upon:

APPENDIX 8

1

Tel & Fax: \

COUNSELLING SKILLS GROUP

SPRING 1995

19th April, 1995

Dear

I would like to thank you again for sparing the time to take part in my counselling skills course. It has certainly been of great help to me and I hope that the group members have benefited too. Thanks also for completing the evaluation sheets which I gave out at the end of Session Nine and for the valuable contributions which you made to the whole-group discussions.

As you know, at the end of Session Ten Cynthia asked that I send out copies of the evaluation sheets completed during that session. I have copied below the flip charts of each of the two groups.

Looking forward to having the group together again on July 13th.

Yours,

Session 10 appraisal lists:

Pat's Group.

- 1(a) Learned to make better responses and ask more open ended questions.
- (b) I listen more and am more conscious of what is being said and how it's being said (body language).
- 2(a) A lot more depth to it than thought before starting the course,
- (b) be aware of limitations,
- (c) realise it is a responsible and privileged position,
- (d) respect confidentiality.
- 3 We all came as individuals with the same fears about the course but have integrated very well, enabling us to develop trust and express all thoughts in a relaxed atmosphere.
- 4 To facilitate in dealings with clients and staff and also in our personal lives.
- 5 Be more aware before speaking, more hesitant in giving advice.

Mandy's Group.

1. Increased confidence.
Recognition of self achievement.
Improved listening skills.
Ability to cope.
No longer afraid to express (feelings).
2. There's no "right" or "wrong".
Not there to advise.
Absolute trust (confidentiality).
Ability to allow expression.
3. Each individual is of equal value.
We are all "nice" people.
Different life experience provides different perspectives.
4. All aspects of life.
Recognition of own problems.
Don't expect a solution.
5. Stand back and listen.
Be aware of underlying problems.
Recognise we are not "Superwoman".

APPENDIX 9.

Tel & Fax:

29 June 1995

Dear Course Member,

I am sorry my greeting sounds so impersonal but, as usual, time is getting scarce and I am using the quickest way I can.

Our final appraisal of the Counselling Skills course is now due and I am looking forward to seeing you next Thursday, 13th July, as arranged - 10 a.m. to 12.30 at 67, Liverpool Road, Chester. I hope you can spare the time to stay and have some lunch together afterwards.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the introduction to my dissertation, not to blind you with science or to impress you with my ability to write long sentences, but so that you have the opportunity to correct what I have said about your job if you feel that is necessary.

I also wanted to give you an idea of what I was setting out to do for my dissertation so that you could, perhaps, come prepared with some ideas for feed-back. Has the course had any lasting effect on you, your life, or the way you perceive your job? I am sure that everyone enhanced their counselling/listening skills but I am also interested to know how you feel you have developed personally - if at all.

See you soon.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 10

JULY FOLLOW-UP APPRAISAL LISTS:

Mandy's Group.

More patient;

Think before you speak;

Listen with more awareness;

Conscious of own/other's body language/facial expressions;

Accept your own limitations;

Recognise the need to off-load and receive on-going support;

Would like on-going training.

Maureen's Group.

Calming situations;

Analysing other's words of advice;

Not as aggressive;

More aware of other's words/moods etc.;

More self-awareness;

Putting yourself in the picture; i.e. making space for yourself.

Not making space for yourself (in other people's concerns);

Don't go in feet first;

More eye contact;

More physical contact.

APPENDIX 11

Tel: _____

5th January, 1996

Dear

Happy New Year.

I have at last made some progress toward writing up my research project. Having got this far I realise that quite a lot of the material in the chapter which gives an account of the progress of the course could be viewed as confidential. Chester College reserves the right to publish students' research work if they think it worthwhile.

Therefore, before I go any further, I would be grateful if you could spare the time to read it through and correct it; let me know if there are any alterations or amendments which you would like me to make. Also please tell me if I am too far off-beam with any of my comments.

It might be that you would rather that I changed your name throughout this report so that your own personal progress could not be identified. I tried to write it up using assumed names but I found that this spoilt my understanding of what had gone on, however I will alter it for anyone who wants me to.

I am due to see my tutor again on Friday 19th January, so could you please let me know before that date of any amendments which you would like me to make - a 'phone call would do. If I hear nothing before then I will take it that you are reasonably happy with what I have written.

I hope you are well.

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 12

Telephone & Fax

19th February, 1996

Dear

I expect you are beginning to dread getting yet another communication about my dissertation. I promise you that this is the last one.

It is part of the research method to get the project participants to check my findings, but as I am actually at the stage of sending the first draft of the complete dissertation to my tutor this should be the end as far as you are concerned.

As before I would be glad if you could have a look through what I have written and let me know if you want anything added to, or deleted from, this "Results" chapter.

Some members of the group indicated that they would enjoy getting together again on an occasional basis, so I wondered if you would like to come here for a cup of tea on Wednesday, 6th March, at around 3 p.m. We could then discuss the results and catch up on each other's news at the same time. Failing that perhaps you could ring me with your comments as you did before.

Hope you are well,

Yours sincerely,

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